

Our views Saturday, January 21, 2006

Construction cash

Small-business owners have big opportunity

Go purchase a hammer, because this \$2 billion construction project at Fort Bliss is truly something special in the history of El Paso.

The federal government will spend the money to build what's been called a new city in our midst in order to accommodate an expected 25,000 additional soldiers.

And last week, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers advised some 600 small-business owners how they can get some of that work. The event was sponsored by the Greater El Paso Chamber of Commerce.

The figure \$2 billion is a lot to comprehend. The "billions" word is not often used when talking about tangibles. Life of Planet Earth. Sand granules on the seashore. So think of \$2 billion, then, as being 2,000 different million-dollar things.

That's one big construction project, and Col. John R. Minahan, who commands the Corps' Fort Worth District, said, "We are encouraging small businesses and minority businesses to contract with the government to get the job done on schedule."

Richard Dayoub, president of the Greater Chamber, said: "Of all the critical initiatives that the Greater Chamber is responsible for addressing in our community, none are more important than assuring that El Paso businesses have the opportunity to obtain contracts and grow."

The list of projects will be made available in the next few weeks.

And since Minahan said, "We're going to be basically building another city at Biggs (Army Airfield)," one can figure some of the things a new city needs. Just look around.

It's also government money going from Washington, D.C., to pockets of those who are working on the El Paso projects -- 2,000 different million-dollar things.

Minahan promises a "level playing field" when it comes to awarding contracts to bidders.

And Rep. Silvestre Reyes, D-El Paso, told small-business leaders of El Paso: "There's a role for each of you. You (small businesses) are the backbone of this community and we want you to be successful."

Jose Montes, regional director of the Small Business Administration, said last week's Industry Day

shows the commitment the federal government has to work with El Paso's small businesses.

"It means prosperity ... not only in the construction field, but in other areas as well," he said.

Already large construction companies are scouting El Paso small businesses to work as subcontractors.

There will be a lot of opportunities available, not just with hammers and concrete. Donald Eppolito, who represents Midwest Industrial Supply, gave one example. He said he needs El Paso's help to work as subcontractors to help protect trails in the desert that are created by tanks ... which are coming here as part of the 25,000 new soldiers ... who require a whole new city ... which will be built with \$2 billion, or 2,000 million-dollar projects of this, that and a whole lot of other things.

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